

REITH LECTURES 1979: The African Condition

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Lecture 5: Patterns of Identity

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In this talk I want to say something about five of the different cleavages afflicting Africa: religion, ethnicity, ideology, nationality and class. The weakest of these for the time being is class. A Kikuyu peasant is probably Kikuyu first and a peasant second. In a confrontation between Kalenjin peasants on one side and the Kikuyu petit bourgeoisie on the other, the chances are that the Kikuyu peasant will side with his fellow Kikuyu, regardless of class, rather than with his fellow peasants, regardless of ethnic affinity. The distinguished Kenyan dissident, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, wrote a book called *Not Yet Uhuru* - 'not yet freedom'. He belonged to the school of thought which saw the Kenyatta régime as a case of continuing dependency. He tried to lead a movement based on class consciousness, and dedicated towards basic land reform and social transformation. He expected the peasants and workers of Kenya to rally behind his Kenya People's Party. But when he turned around to look, his only followers were fellow Luo, of almost all classes. A movement designed to be truly proletarian suddenly discovered that it was naked and its ethnic organ was showing! Oginga Odinga's message was before its time. He thought he could mobilise class-consciousness in defence of social and political transformation. He discovered that people were still members of 'tribes' first and members of social classes only secondarily. For the time being, religion, ethnicity, ideology and the new state system have played a more decisive role than class in Africa's history. Let's look at these forces more closely.

Africa's record on the religious front has so far been relatively impressive. After all, it wasn't until 1960 that the United States could sufficiently divorce politics from religion to elect its first Roman Catholic President, John Kennedy. Yet in 1960 Senegal became independent with Leopold Senghor as the Roman Catholic President in an overwhelmingly Muslim country. The American electorate was not sure whether to trust a fellow Christian from another denomination, and remains unsure today whether it would ever elect a practising Jew for President in this century. Yet the electorate of Senegal convincingly put its trust in Leopold Senghor in spite of the greater religious divide between Islam and Catholicism. Tanzania, for that matter, has more Muslims than Christians. Yet President Nyerere has continued to enjoy a decisive and convincing level of support from his compatriots across the religious divide. Julius Nyerere, like Leopold Senghor, is a Roman Catholic. The real reason for African ecumenicalism is simply the capacity of African traditional religions to tolerate and accommodate alternative religious cultures. I am not saying that there has been no religious tension and even serious strife in Africa. What I am saying is that what appears to be religious strife is at times a reflection of other forms of conflict. For example, in 1977, Archbishop Lwum of the Anglican Church of Uganda was apparently murdered on Amin's orders. Most of the world immediately concluded that he was killed because he was an Anglican bishop. But was it not equally possible that he was murdered because he was an Acholi? Idi Amin had periodically turned against

the Acholi with ferocious genocidal sadism ever since he captured power in 1971. This was partly because the Acholi had been the largest single group in the army of Milton Obote, the man Amin overthrew, and partly because the Acholi had a reputation as strong warriors and dangerous adversaries. By the time the Archbishop was murdered he was one of the two or three most prominent Acholis still visible on the national scene in Uganda. Indeed, Archbishop Luwum was murdered alongside another prominent Acholi, Lt-Col Oryema, who was then a Minister in Amin's government. The question persists: was the murder of the Archbishop sectarian or ethnic? It certainly was not as purely a case of religious victimisation as the world press preferred to portray it. Ethnicity is a more serious line of cleavage in black Africa than religion. Africans are far more likely to kill one another because they belong to different ethnic groups than because they belong to different religions.

Political parties in Africa are more likely to respond to ethnic and regional symbols than to ideological slogans as such. But is ideology now assuming a new importance in African politics? The most important ideological developments of the 1970s in Africa have been the emergence of Marxist regimes in former Portuguese Africa and Ethiopia, on the one hand, and the partial revival of political liberalism in western Africa, on the other. Karl Marx himself expected socialist revolutions to take place in the more advanced of the capitalist countries. The irony of Marxism in Africa in the 1970s is that it was embraced by Ethiopia, a country just beginning to emerge from archaic feudalism, and by the former colonies of Portugal, which was itself the most backward of all the European powers that had ruled Africa. By contrast, Britain was at the time of colonialism the most advanced of the European powers controlling Africa. And yet for the time being not a single country previously ruled by Britain in Africa has gone Marxist. In the 1970s the most radical of the black African states formerly ruled by Britain was thought to be Nyerere's Tanzania. Yet African Marxists would regard Nyerere's policies of *ujamaa*—socialism based on African concepts of familyhood—as either a sham or a case of false consciousness. Many of Tanzania's own radicals on the campus of the University of Dar es Salaam would at best regard Nyerere's work as a mildly progressive effort and Nyerere as at best a relatively progressive bourgeois. In the 1980s it is conceivable that the ideological pattern in Africa will change. One or two former British colonies may indeed be tempted to go Marxist. Some people expect Zimbabwe to go Marxist if the Patriotic Front prevails. That is by no means certain, but in principle it is at least one scenario. What is clear so far is that the impact of Britain hasn't led the former colonies to embrace Marxism on the rebound. On the contrary, there are signs of some partial if fitful revival of liberal democratic thinking in former British West African countries. Britain first bequeathed the Westminster model to her former colonies, and then witnessed its collapse in one African country after another. The liberal democratic model of more than one party in competition with one another, civil liberties in terms of freedom of expression and organisation, and an independent judiciary, fell victim to two African trends in the 1960s: first, the attraction of centralised government and the one-party system; and, secondly, the intervention of the military in politics. Certainly the one-party state was widely eulogised, and regarded as Africa's distinctive approach to democracy. But since then disenchantment with military rule has led to renewed interest in the open society and pluralism in the context of a multiparty system. The people of Ghana and Nigeria seem keen to return to liberal democracy and civilian rule. The old songs of a one party system are no longer as popular. It remains to be seen whether the soldiers

of those countries will genuinely permit the process of re-democratisation to take place.

Winds of liberal democratic change are also blowing through parts of former French Africa. When I talked earlier this year to President Leopold Senghor of Senegal he told me with some pride about the restoration of interparty competition in his country. He discussed the new freedoms for newspapers, and the ease with which additional newspapers could be established, provided they were not subsidised from abroad. He assured me of the independence of the Supreme Court, estimating that in some periods the Supreme Court has rejected an average of six out of every ten decisions that have come before it from the lower courts. Many of these findings of the Supreme Court are contrary to the wishes of the government. In Senegal I also interviewed a number of Opposition leaders, including those whose parties are not recognised by the constitution. These leaders criticised the system strongly. There is no doubt that Senegal is not yet a truly open society; but it is significantly more open than most of its neighbours. The very fact that the Opposition leaders spoke so bitterly and so strongly to a stranger, denouncing their own President, was itself some indication that the system was not as repressive as the average régime in Africa.

It seems clear that most distinctive trends ideologically in West Africa in the 1970s have included a liberal revival, while the most important ideological shift in Southern Africa has been the emergence of Mozambique and Angola as Marxist states. In the Horn of Africa, both Ethiopia and the Somali Republic have maintained their relative radicalism, though their foreign policies and choice of external allies have fluctuated. In Zambia, President Kaunda is groping for a new ideology which transcends nationalism. Kaunda calls it 'humanism'. It is difficult to be sure how socialism is supposed to relate to humanism in Kaunda's thought. Is socialism a stage towards humanism, something intermediate before full human empathy is achieved? Or is socialism an aspect of humanism? The two are not of course the same. After all, Karl Marx regarded capitalism as a stage towards socialism; but that did not make capitalism an aspect of socialism in Marx's sense.

There is a third question. Is socialism in fact an alternative to humanism as an ideology for Africa? The two might be progressive and equally legitimate. In this sense, Kaunda could be a humanist and Nyerere a socialist—and the two be both progressive and in alliance. A few months ago I talked at length with President Kaunda and he spoke of how some of his peers used to pull his leg concerning his idea of 'humanism'. Julius Nyerere jested with Kaunda, telling him that his 'humanism' was popular with the West because it was ultimately soft on Western interests. Kaunda denied that humanism was a soft vision in that sense. And I'm sure he would deny that his moves to nationalise Western mineral interests in Zambia were partly in response to the taunts of friends like Julius Nyerere. But, in the end, Kaunda is a pragmatist caught in the turmoil both of the political upheaval of Southern Africa and the economic disarray of the copper market. Between this copper devil and the deep waters of regional conflict, Kaunda has had to make adjustments to reconcile ideology to reality. But in our conversation I was particularly intrigued by his belief in world government. Not many heads of state in the world subscribe to that vision, and very few heads of state in Africa have the time to indulge in such ambitious futurology. Kaunda's belief in world government enabled me to begin to see why he called himself a 'humanist'. In his view, violence in man can ultimately be controlled

only through a combination of two things—the self-restraint of the individual person and the global discipline of the world authority.

He had once been a devout Gandhian, subscribing to satyagraha as the force of discipline of the soul. He was converted to passive resistance as a strategy of struggle for freedom and justice. When Kaunda became head of state he discovered before long the need to use violence. This included violence to suppress the fanatical religious movement of Alice Lenshina in 1964. In desperation, as the fanatics killed and maimed, Kaunda virtually gave his security forces a freehand to use as much counter-violence in suppressing the movement as the security forces thought necessary. It included instructions to shoot to kill. Kaunda was caught up in the dialectic of a state trying to monopolise the legitimacy of the use of physical force within its boundaries. In pursuit of that monopoly the state is often driven to use violence against its own citizens. Given that Kaunda is attracted to the theory of non-violence and its moral implications, and at the same time is forced to recognise that the global state system tends to be violent by nature, it is not surprising that the President of Zambia has veered towards a belief in world government. His two principles of individual self-restraint and global authority begin to appear as interdependent. He seems to some extent to be resigned to the persistence of at least certain forms of violence in Africa, and indeed in the world, for as long as the state system continues. And, given that there are states in the world, someone has to head them. He is one such head himself, in spite of the deep-seated revulsion against violence.

As this decade comes to a close some old questions about Africa and its conflicts still persist. How dangerous are the artificial state frontiers created by imperial experience? How unstable is the ethnic mixture within each African country? One of the closing illustrations of interstate conflicts in the 1970s was the military confrontation between Uganda and Tanzania from October 1978 to April of this year. In the course of that conflict, there was increasing evidence that President Nyerere had launched a doctrine of Pax Tanzaniana—the doctrine of pursuing peace and stability in other countries under the auspices of Tanzania. Pax Tanzaniana had points of comparison with Pax Britannica. The British had once aspired to consolidate peace and terminate tribal warfare through British initiative. Tanzania had had comparable moral ambitions on a more modest scale, even if it involved direct intervention or interference. Sometimes there has been no disagreement among Africans. In Southern Africa, Pax Tanzaniana has been part of Tanzania's leadership of the front line states. This has been widely accepted in Africa. There was also a time when Pax Tanzaniana sought to influence the destiny of Nigeria. Mwalimu Nyerere recognised Biafra in April 1968. The Mwalimu was seeking a solution to the Nigerian civil war, and was on the side of the separatists in that primary conflict.

Then there was Tanzania's decision to close the border with Kenya—to teach Kenya a lesson, and, some would argue, to create sufficient instability in Kenya for a change of régime. In the case of Uganda, Tanzania sought to punish the Amin régime militarily. In the case of Kenya, Tanzania has attempted to teach the government in Nairobi a lesson by economic means. The Mwalimu of Tanzania—and let us remember that the Swahili word *mwalimu* does mean 'teacher'—has often lived up to his name, dispensing lessons both to distant and neighbouring states.

Tanzania's invasion of Uganda was unprecedented in the history of Africa. What one wonders is whether it establishes a precedent of one African country invading another in order to change the régime in power. A qualitative modification may have taken place in the structure of the state system in Africa. Tanzania may only be the first of new sub-imperial powers in the continent. Pax Tanzaniana may have imitators in the years ahead. Fears of this kind were certainly expressed quite forcefully at the first summit meeting of the Organisation of African Unity following the successful capture of Kampala. It remains to be seen whether the OAU will introduce changes in its own machinery, and perhaps even establish a security apparatus of its own, strong enough to reduce, if not completely eliminate, the danger of major military invasions between African countries themselves in the years ahead.

What confronts Africa is a choice between a system of collective security and a system of international vigilantism. An African high command or a police force under the OAU would provide a structure for pan-African security. A number of French-speaking African countries have recommended that this should be established, especially since last year's invasion of the Shaba province of Zaire by opponents of President Mobuto operating from Angola. Moroccan troops formed the nucleus of the African force which replaced the French troops in war-ravaged Shaba after the invasion. The King of Morocco and the President of Senegal, among others, felt that it was time for Africa to establish its own machinery of continental law-enforcement. Nyerere was among those who opposed this initiative. Nyerere had his own good reasons for doing so, not least because he suspected that France was playing the part of an invisible prompter at the side of the francophone stage.

Nevertheless, the idea of a pan-African security system could have been examined independently of the controversy surrounding France's role in suppressing the anti-Mobuto invaders of Shaba province. By opposing the proposed force, Nyerere helped to reduce the options available to the Organisation of African Unity in matters of collective security. The only viable alternative was international vigilantism of precisely the kind Tanzania embarked upon when it invaded Uganda and toppled the Amin régime this year.

Nyerere violated international law partly in order to return Uganda to the rules of international decency. He helped to terminate arbitrary rule in Uganda by himself resorting to an act of international arbitrariness. One is reminded of the old American frontier days when 'vigilance committees', as they were called, consisting of dedicated citizens, attempted to maintain law and order by summary proceedings.

Nyerere does not believe in summary justice in his domestic policies. He is in reality a liberal democrat with a socialist veneer. But he has practised summary justice in his foreign policy. The economic actions against Kenya and the military invasion of Amin's Uganda are his most striking exercises in international vigilantism.

But can one blame him? Isn't the whole area of Africa's international relations still an untamed frontier? Is there not a need for vigilantes? Political banditry is certainly still on the loose in the continent. Idi Amin was a bandit and deserved his final fate. But there is a crying need for proper pan-African procedures rather than just vigilante initiatives. I would not worry too much if every African vigilante was Nyerere—humane, sophisticated and sensitive to the wider implications of every act of policy.

Nyerere may commit major international blunders from time to time—including his recognition of Biafra in April 1968—but his heart is probably in the right place.

Unfortunately, we can't guarantee that every international vigilante will be a Nyerere. It would be a greater service to Africa if Nyerere joined those francophone states that are groping for a continental system of collective security. His involvement would itself reduce the danger of this pan-African security system being manipulated by France.

What is needed is a marriage between Nkrumah's old idea of an African high command designed to keep imperialist invaders at bay and the newly proposed pan-African force designed to put the African house in order. Africa needs to be protected both from external enemies and from internal deviants. There is a crying need in the continent for collective military self-reliance. The presence of Cuban troops to do Africa's dirty work is a humiliating confession of the continent's military impotence. Here was a region with large armies scattered in different societies, but armies better at repressing their own people, rather than at liberating other parts of the continent. Why were Cuban troops necessary to stem the South African challenge in Angola in 1975 and 1976? There were, after all, enough African states in sympathy with the Popular Movement for the liberation of Angola. Why did they not put their armaments where their mouths were—and intervene on behalf of the MPLA.

The Organisation of African Unity has recognised the special diplomatic role of the front line states in Southern Africa. Before long the OAU should also contribute to the military defence of the front line states. Some of them, after all, have already suffered militarily from the white-dominated regimes. Reprisal raids into the front line states will get worse in the future when the wars of liberation engulf the Republic of South Africa itself.

Protecting Africa from external enemies and internal deviants needs more than vigilante exercises from time to time. It needs the political will to transcend Africa's own fragmentation and establish a capacity for self-defence, and self-pacification. After all, these are two of the pillars for genuine self-development.